

Where dwellen ye, if it to telle be?

IN the suburbs of a town, quod he,
Lurkyng in hernes and in lanes blynde,
Wheras thise robbours and thise
theves by kynde,
Holden hir pryvee fereful residence,
As they that dar not shewen hir presence,
So faren we, if I shall seye the sothe.

Now, quod oure Hoost, yit lat me talke to the;

Why artow so discoloured of thy face?

Peter! quod he, God yeve it harde grace,
I am so used in the fyr to blowe,
That it hath chaunged my colour, I trowe.

I am nat wont in no mirour to prie,

But swynke soore, and lerne multiplie.

We blondren evere, and pouren in the fir,

And for al that we faille of our desir,

For evere we lakken oure conclusioun.

To muchel folk we doon illusioun,

And borwe gold, be it a pound or two,

Or ten, or twelve, or manye sommes mo,

And make hem wenen, at the leeste weye,

That of a pound we koude make tweye!

Yet is it fals; but ay we han good hope

It for to doon, and after it we grope.

But that science is so fer us biforn,

We mowen nat, although we hadde it sworn,

It overtake, it slit away so faste;

It wol us maken beggers atte laste.

WILL this yeman was thus in his

talkyng,

This chanoun drough hym

neer, and herde al thyng

Which this yeman spak, for

suspecioun

Of mennes speche evere hadde this chanoun.

For Catoun seith, that he that gilty is

Demeth alle thyng be spoke of hym, ywis,

That was the cause he gan so ny hym drawe

To his yeman, to herkennen al his sawe.

And thus he seyde unto his yeman tho:

WOLDE thou thy pees, and speke no

wordes mo!

for if thou do, thou shalt it deere abyen

Thou sclaudrest me heere in this com-

paignye,

And eek discoverest that thou sholdest

hyde.

Ye? quod our Hoost, telle on, what so

bityde;

Of al his thretynge rekke nat a myte!

In feith, quod he, namoore I do but lyte.

AND when this chanoun saugh it wolde

nat be,

But his yeman wolde telle his pryvetee.

He fledde away for verray sorwe and shame.

Al! quod the yeman, heere shal arise game.

Al that I kan anon now wol I telle,

Syn he is goon, the foule feend hym quelle!

for nevere heerafter wol I with hym meete

for peny ne for pound, I yow biheete!

He that me brought first unto that game,

Er that he dye, sorwe have he and shame!

for it is earnest to me, by my feith;

That feele I wel, whatso any man seith,

And yet, for al my smert, and al my grief,

for al my sorwe, labour, and meschief,

I koude nevere leve it in no wise.

Now wolde God, my wit myghte suffice

To tellen al that longeth to that art!

And natheles yow wol I tellen part:

Syn that my lord is goon, I wol nat spare;

Swich thyng as that I knowe, I wol declare.

Here endeth the prologe of the Chanouns

Yemannes Tale.

WAT sholde I tellen eche proporcioun

Of thynges whiche that we werche upon,

As on fyve or sixe ounces, may wel be,

Of silver or som oother quantite,

And biwe me to telle yow the names

Of orpyment, brent bones, iren squames,

That into poudre grounden been ful smal?

And in an erthen pot how put is al,

And salt yput in, and also papeer,

Biforn these poudres that I speke of heer,

And wel ycovered with a lampe of glas;

And of the pot and glasses enlutynge,

And of the eyre myghte passe out nothyng,

That of the eyr fir and smart also,

Which that was maad, and of the care and wo

That we hadde in oure matires sublymyng,

And in amalgamyng and calcenyng

Of quyksilver, yclept mercurie crude?

For alle our sleighes we kan nat conclude.

Oure orpyment and sublymed mercurie,

Oure grounden litarge eek on the porfurie,

Oure ech of thise of ounces a certeyn,

Noght helpeth us, oure labour is in veyn.

Ne eek oure spirites ascencioun,

Ne oure matires that lyen al fix adoun,

Mowen in oure werkynge nothyng us availe.

For lost is al oure labour and travaile,

And al the cost, a twenty devel way,

Is lost also, which we upon it lay.

WER is also ful many another thyng

That is unto oure craft apertenynge;

Thogh I by ordre hem nat reherce kan,

Bycause that I am a lewed man;

Yet wol I telle hem as they come to mynde,

Thogh I ne kan nat sette hem in hir kynde;

As boole armonyak, vertgrees, boras,

And sondry vessels maad of erthe and glas,

Oure urynales, and our descensories,

Violes, croslets, and sublymatories,

Cucurbites, and alambikes eek,

And othere swiche, deere ynough a leek.

Nat nedeth it for to reherce hem alle,

Matres rubifyng, and boles galle,

Arsenyk, sal armonyak, and brymstoon;

And herbes koude I telle eek many oon,

As egremoyne, valerian, and lunarie,

And othere swiche, if that me liste tarie.

Oure lampes brennyng bothe nyght and day,

To brynge aboute oure purpos if we may;

Oure fourneys eek of calcinacioun,

And of watres albificacioun,

Unsekked lym, chalk, and gleyre of an ey,

Poudres diverse, ashes, donge, pisse, and cley,

Cered pokets, sal peter, vitriole,

And diverse fires maad of wode and cole;

Sal tartre, alkaly, and sal preparat,

And combust matires, and coagulat,

Cley maad with hors or mannes heer, and oille

Of tartre, alum, glas, berme, wort, and argoille,

Resalgar, and oure matires enbiblyng;

And eek of oure matires encorpyoryng,

And of oure silver citrinacioun,

Oure cementyng and fermentacioun,

Oure yngottes, testes, and many mo.

WOL yow telle, as was me taught also,

The foure spirites and the bodies sevene,

By ordre, as ofte I herde my lord hem

nevene.

The firste spirit quyksilver called is,

The seconde orpyment, the thridde, ywis,

Sal armonyak, and the ferthe brymstoon.

The bodies sevene eek, lo! hem heere anon:

Sol gold is, and Luna silver we threpe,

Mars iren, Mercurie quyksilver we clepe,

Saturnus leed, and Juppiter is tyn,

And Venus coper, by my fader kyn!

This cursed craft whoso wole excercise,

He shal no good han that hym may suffice;

for al the good he spendeth therabout,

He lese shal, therof have I no doute.

Whoso that listeth outen his folie,

Lat hym come forth, and lerne multiplie;

And every man that oght bath in his cofre,

Lat hym appiere, and were a philosopre.

Asaunce that craft is so light to leere?

Nay, nay, God woot, al be he monk or frere,

Preest or chanoun, or any oother wyght,

Thogh he sitte at his book bothe day and night

In lernyng of this elvysshe nyce loore,

At is in veyn, and parde, muchel moore!

To lerne a lewed man this subtiltee,

fy! speke nat therof, for it wol nat bee;

And konne he letterure, or konne he noon,

As in effect, he shal fynde it al oon.

for bothe two, by my savacioun,

Concluden, in multiplicacioun,

Ylike wel, whan they han al ydo;

This is to seyn, they failen bothe two.

ET forgat I to maken rehersaille

Of watres corosif, and of lymaille,

And of bodies mollificacioun,

And also of hire induracioun,

Oilles, ablucions, and metal fusible,

To tellen al wolde passen any bible

That owher is; wherfore, as for the beste,

Of alle these names now wol I me reste.

for as I trowe, I have yow toold ynowe

To reyse a feend, al looke he never so rowe.

Al! nay! lat be; the philosophres stoon,

Elixir clept, we sechen faste echoon,

for hadde we hym, thanne were it siker ynow.

But, unto God of hevne I make avow,

for al oure craft, whan we han al ydo,

With al oure sleighte, he wol nat come us to.

He hath ymaad us spenden muchel good,

for sorwe of which almost we wexen wood,

But that good hope crepeth in oure herte,

Supposynge ever, though we sore smerte,

To be releved by hym afterward.

Swich supposyng and hope is sharpe and hard;

I warne yow wel it is to seken evere;

That futur temps hath maad men to dissevere,

In trust therof, from al that evere they hadde.

Yet of that art they kan nat wexen sadde,

for unto hem it is a bitter sweete;